

FWHCA Update Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

November 5, 2013 Meeting Summary

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm
Oak Harbor Public Works Facility
1 NE 6th Street
1400 NE 16th Avenue, Oak Harbor

Attendees: Sarah Cassat (Whidbey Island Conservation District), Robin Clark (Whidbey Watershed Stewards), Steve Erickson (Whidbey Environmental Action Network), Jamie Hartley (Island County), Tim Hyatt (Skagit River System Cooperative), Dan Nickel (Watershed Company – Island County’s consultant), Sarah Sandstrom (Watershed Company – Island County’s consultant), Sarah Schmidt (Whidbey Audubon), Kira Swanson (Island County), Jennifer Thomas (Parametrix – Island County’s consultant), Doug Thompson (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), George Wilhere (teleconference) (WDFW – Watershed Characterization Technical Advisory Team), Chris Wilson (teleconference) (Polymer Land Consultants), Todd Zackey (Tulalip Tribes)

House Keeping

- **Agenda Review**
- **Review of October 17, 2013 Meeting Summary:** TAG members did not have sufficient time to review minutes. Any changes or comments should be sent to Kira Swanson.
 - Request that greater emphasis be given to concern regarding Best Available Science (BAS) review of marine activities in shoreline jurisdiction because there was a large discussion regarding this issue and without including marine activities it is believed that the BAS review would be inadequate.

Discussion of Best Available Science (BAS) Review in Shoreline Jurisdiction:

- County staff prepared a memo and explained that due to RCW 36.70A.480, critical areas within shoreline jurisdiction are regulated under the Shoreline Master Program (SMP). Because the SMP will be regulating critical areas, impacts of activities within shoreline jurisdiction will not be examined in FWHCA update BAS review. However, literature regarding the identification of FWHCAs and the impacts on these FWHCA from upland activities will be examined in BAS.
- Comment that the SMP and critical area regulations are linked because the SMP references the critical areas regulations.

- Island County staff said that the SMP will need to be amended in the future to account for changes in critical areas ordinance.
- Comment that the shoreline impacts were not adequately reviewed during the SMP update, now is the chance to address this issue. If shoreline review is not completed then there will be a gap in the science. This is a problem that may open the county up to challenge.
- Staff responded that the appropriate place for that challenge would be through the SMP process. Critical areas within the shoreline jurisdiction must be regulated under the SMP per state law.

BAS Report Review

- Sarah Sandstrom walked the TAG through the document and explained:
 - The BAS document follows a similar format to the Watershed Characterization model so there are sections for water flow, water quality, and habitat assessments.
 - She said the portion of the document that needs to be flushed out is the local data piece and until that work is completed, then the management implications portion cannot be completed.
- Question regarding how close the document is to completion.
- Sarah Sandstrom responded that the document will continue to be refined and a second draft will be completed at the end of November.
- Comment which emphasized that the update should not be limited to the review of the required FWHCAs (as identified in Washington Administrative Code and Island County Code), but instead should consider other at risk species. The reason is because the definition and designation of FWHCAs are not typically how ecologists would think of habitats and they do not capture all sensitive species/habitats.
- Suggestion to include the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Priority and Habitat Species (PHS).
- Sarah Sandstrom explained that the PHS data does not always contain location specific information.
- Comment concurring with Sarah Sandstrom regarding the accuracy of PHS locations and a suggestion that prairies have a subsection within Section 2 of the document.
- Sarah Sandstrom explained that there is a prairie section in Section 3.3, but she could shift the sections around as necessary.
- Question regarding whether or not additional the species and habitats of local importance can be listed during the FWHCA update.
- Dan Nickel clarifies that there are two components to this question. During the FWHCA update, the consultants will be examining the nomination process.

Whether or not new species and habitats of local importance will be added during the update is a policy decision.

- Question regarding whether the BAS report will include information on potential species and habitats of local importance.
- Jennifer Thomas explains that information is not always available, but one thing the report does is identify information gaps.
- Jamie Hartley explains that the decision to add new species is a policy decision. However, gathering relevant data about species and habitats in Island County is one of the roles of the TAG.
- Comment that it is important to identify species that need conservation.
- Discussion around the term “need conservation”. Decision that this is a value laden term. The role of the TAG is not to determine which species need conservation. The role of the TAG is to evaluate the scientific research and existing data sets. The research may identify species that are at risk due to low populations or habitat fragmentation, information on these vulnerable species should be included in the report when available.
- Question regarding where in the BAS report document local knowledge should be included in the report.
- Suggestion that the PHS data, the Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program (NHP) data, and the Nature Conservancy’s Eco-regional assessments also be included in the report.
- Dan Nickel said that the consultants would begin a table with the PHS, NHP, and Eco-regional assessments that the TAG could then add to based on their local knowledge.
- Once this table is assembled Kira Swanson will email it to the TAG, TAG members should then comment on the table and send back to Kira Swanson and the consultants will compile the information received.
- Suggestion that western toad, pond turtle, and praries be added to the list.
- Question regarding which PHS species are specific to Island County.
- Sarah Sandstrom responded that there is a table available by county. However, she says that there is not always information to supplement the list. She said the TAG members could provide information on species abundance if they have information available.
- Sarah Sandstrom explains that management considerations is currently a placeholder at this time and they will be adding to it in future versions.
- Question regarding the word “recommendations” in that section.
- Sarah Sandstrom clarifies that recommendations is a policy word, and that management consideration is the appropriate term because it outlines the information that will be used to make policy decisions.

- Suggestion that numbers be provided in the impervious surface section of the report.
- Sarah Sandstrom that a range of numbers could be provided based on the research.
- Comment that providing a range of numbers can be challenging because these numbers can cover a wide range. Instead it was suggested that a range be provided based on the management consideration for example if the area was managed for bird habitat or large woody debris.
- Comment that a wide range of numbers such as 4-400 is not informative.
- Sarah Sandstrom adds that these numbers may be further refined based on site specific information.
- Dan Nickel and Jennifer Thomas add that the Watershed Characterization piece has not yet been completed and there are landscape considerations that come out of characterization.
- Suggestion that tables could be used to capture ranges for various management options
- Suggestion that a map be included in the BAS Report document that contains the various place names mentioned in the report.
- Comment that the document should be scanned because there are things cited in the text which are not included in the bibliography and things in the bibliography that are not cited in the text.
- Comment that the document relies on documents that synthesize the literature and the key original seminal works must also be cited.
- Comment that on pg 37 Lagari and Jackson is not an appropriate reference.
- Comment that on pg 35 the Colvin reference was not properly referenced.
- Comment that there is a strong emphasis on urban streams in the document, but that these studies might not have much application in Island County
- Sarah says that this is good feedback, but she also requests edits through email so she can synthesize feedback.
- Request that all feedback on the BAS Report document be submitted to Kira Swanson by November 19, 2013. Also requested that that all the feedback on the species lists (which the consultant will compile) be submitted by November 19, 2013.

Watershed Characterization Discussion

- Jennifer Thomas outlines the watershed characterization report.

- She explains the report is not yet completed because we have not decided what maps we will be using in the watershed characterization process.
- The Growth Management Act (GMA) provides the context and overview of landscape scale approach and this will be included in the watershed characterization report.
- The report will also have an overview of the Watershed Characterization process.
 - Scale will also be discussed in the report and the relationship between the larger watershed scale process and the more specific local data.
- The report is not yet written because we have not yet decided what maps will be included in the characterization process.
 - Jennifer explains that the terrestrial habitat model needs updated and that we are hoping to ask George what the timeline would be for updating the model.
- The next section in report would discuss the impacts what factors affect the characterization.
- The final section would examine management implications.
- Jennifer Thomas explains that one of the next steps is the County needs to decide if we want to try to make modifications to the habitat assessment model. She explained that one of the underlying challenges was with parcel data.
- Suggestion that rather than using parcel data, analysis could be completed with aerial photos.
- Suggestion that Paul Adamus had done some analysis of patch size. That data could be useful.
- Comment emphasized that rather than using the watershed characterization data, the County should use local data.
- Suggestion that the County should use Stephen Stanley's recommendation to identify FWHCAs as outlined in his technical memo.
- Question regarding where the wetland data comes from in the water flow model.
 - Jennifer Thomas believes the data comes from the Nation Wetland Inventory and hydric soils.
 - Comment that there is likely some challenges with the data.
- Suggestion to use the model to determine areas which may not have prairies now, but that would have historically contained prairies or would contain prairies if they returned to their natural state.
 - Question about how you would use this data, because how do you examine something that is no longer present.

- Suggestion that this information could be useful in looking at trends.
- Jennifer Thomas said that consultants could provide a map of prairie soils.
- Suggestion that prairie soils may be a place to limit impervious surfaces, because if area returned to its historic state then the prairies may return.
- Comment that there are already separate regulations for Ebey's landing.
- TAG requested prairie soils overlay.
- Question of how accurate soil maps are.
- Comment that it is always suggested to check the soils on site.
- Suggestion that peat soils would also be a good overlay.
 - Suggestion that the Adamus work would have the peat soils overlay.
 - Kira Swanson explained that there has been some challenges in locating and interpreting some of the Adamus work. However, she said she would follow up and try to find the information.
- Jennifer Thomas said she would get the draft Watershed Characterization document to the TAG as soon as possible.
- Dan Nickel said in the mean time they would continue to move forward with the BAS report.
- Question of when the TAG would be able to review the wildlife maps.
 - Jennifer Thomas said she would work on compiling a list of maps and the maps themselves for the next meeting. All the maps may not be ready, especially if the habitat model is rerun. However, the PHS data maps could be brought to the next meeting.
- Question if there is flexibility in the timeline.
 - Kira Swanson and Jamie Hartley explain that the Growth Management Hearing Board set the timeline and we are working to meet this timeline.
- Question regarding how updating the model would address the coarse scale of the model.
 - Jennifer Thomas said until we have a chance to discuss any changes to the model with George Wilhere she could not answer specifically, but one thing that might improve the model would be normalizing the scale so that the assessment units were only compared with other assessments in Island County, rather than throughout the Puget Sound.
- Request that within her report Jennifer Thomas address the role of habitat corridors within an Island environment.
 - Jennifer Thomas said that this could be addressed in her report.
- Kira Swanson asks about the decision matrix and the water flow and water quality maps.
 - Jennifer Thomas said she would see if we could get a link from the Department of Ecology for the updated maps.

Next Steps

- Dan Nickel says at the next meeting every we will have everyone's comments back on the BAS report and species table.
- Question if the Watershed Characterization will look at rates of chance. Tulalip may have a poster with some information about conversion rates in Island County.
 - Jennifer Thomas asks if the Tulalip could share that data.
 - Todd Zackey will see if he can find the poster and any associated data.
- Question if the maps included the Tulalip salmon data.
 - Jennifer Thomas said that the Tulalip data was incorporated.
 - Todd Zackey asks how the data was symbolized. He wants to make the distinction that the data doesn't definitely identify if there are salmon absent from a stream.
 - Comment which emphasizes this is true.
 - Jennifer Thomas will change the maps to say fish presence is "confirmed" or "undetermined".
- Todd Zackey requested to become involved in the modeling discussions because he is doing parallel work for another grant and there may be opportunities for data overlap.

Public Comments

- Islands are a unique ecosystem and there is a field of study dedicated to island biogeography. If this field of study is not included in the BAS report, then some important research is being overlooked.